

++ Steps to a Religious Vocation ++

IT COULD
BE YOU!

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SISTER MARY LAWRENCE



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Steps to a Religious Vocation

In Three Parts

by

SISTER MARY LAWRENCE

An Allegany Franciscan



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JOY TO

Young and Energetic Religious Sisters

and their Superiors

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GET READY

GET SET

GO!

*(Thinking about
the Religious Life?)*

What's Pushing You?

Just as wings carry a bird aloft and a motor moves a boat, there is something pushing you. This something is called a motive. Only a good motive can lift you aloft; only a good motive can move you in the right direction.

Just as a bird needs air to support its wings and a motor needs fuel, you, too, need a power, a support, to keep your motives in good operation. This power, this support, is your vocational ideal.

When studies are harder than you had thought; when there's the temptation to slide over homework; when you feel the pinch of discipline at home or at school, then recall your vocational ideal. Now is your time of preparation. Each detail of home life, and of Church and school, is meant to help you reach your vocational ideal. Squander nothing, waste no opportunity.

When some day you attain your vocational ideal, you will be all the happier in that life for having made your youth a time of spiritual, of scholastic and social preparation. Having disciplined your mind and body in youth, you will carry into your chosen vocation the purity of body and soul, the respect for authority, the desire to take an honorable place in society that will bring you at last to your final vocation — eternal happiness.

Are You Willing?

Have you ever shopped for a bargain — a hat or suit, some fishing equipment, a piece of jewelry, perhaps with nothing special in mind? A certain young man on one occasion did have something special in mind.

He came to Jesus, asking, "What shall I do to get to heaven?"

"You know the Commandments," Jesus replied.

"Master," the youth returned, "I have kept these ever since I was a child."

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said: "One thing is lacking; go, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me."

What happened then? St. Mark tells us that the young man's face fell and he went away sad, for he had great possessions.

Like the young man in the Gospel, hundreds of young Catholics have the qualifications for the religious life: good health, mental and physical, and good character. God singles them out, blesses them with a religious vocation, promises them "treasure in heaven," and invites them to follow Him as a priest or a religious. Scores of young men and women surpass the Gospel story with a happy ending; others go away sad like the rich young man who dodged his vocation. The young man's riches symbolize anything or anybody that interferes with answering a vocation to the religious life. The personal down payment in your case may not be the riches of

the young man in the Gospel story. It may be a lovable, impish baby sister, a parent's tears or angry words, the promise of a trip to Europe, the lure of college life or a well-paying job. It may be a selfish love of personal freedom.

If God blesses you with a religious vocation, you, too, may be asked to make a down payment toward your "treasure in heaven." Don't go away sad! God never asks too much.

All the saints in heaven, most especially the priest-saints and saints who were religious Brothers and Sisters, would like to call out to you: "Empty the trinkets from your pocket now, so that *you* may have treasure in heaven!"

Were You There?

Good moral character is a prime requisite for the religious life, as you know. Not that candidates for the priesthood or the religious life are saints! Saints are in heaven. On earth, good Christians strive to avoid sin and practice virtue. The following little meditation will set you thinking. Were you there?

That holy night when Christ was born, were you there? "How could I be?" you say; "I am a boy (or girl) of today." But the Infant Jesus knew you would want to be there, and asks you now to come and see yourself beside His manger bed where, centuries ago, He invited others in your stead.

First came the angels. Their Gloria was not of human note. It was their radiant purity that spoke to Jesus of His Father's glory and pledged peace on earth. Angels came in radiant purity. . . . Were you there in peace, giving glory to God?

Shepherds were invited, as you know, to go over to Bethlehem. They believed the angel's word and hoped to find—and did—Christ the Lord. He was their love and joy. And you—is this also your part? If so, it admits you to the sacred place where the Holy Babe still greets those who have a shepherd's faith and love.

Are you in the caravan of kings who bring precious gifts? "What," you say, "have I to bring, fit for a King?" Look now into the treasure of your heart. Is the gold of adoration there? And the myrrh of virtue—have you an ample share of these: humility, simplicity, obedience, kindness—all to please the Infant King? Good works and prayer make incense rare, fit for a royal Babe.

See, then—you are His company, if at His manger bed yourself you see instead of angels and shepherds and Magi; and you are just as blessed as these first Christmas guests. No joy can surpass yours—excepting this: your own *eternal* Christmas.

What Will They Say?

A parent's attitude toward a son's or daughter's vocation to the religious life is always prompted by love. But this love may be either real or misguided.

Real love prompts the right attitude that a religious vocation is the greatest grace after that of Baptism and is a sign of God's special love for a boy or girl. Parents with this attitude value their children's happiness and spiritual welfare so much that they generously co-operate.

Misguided love prompts a wrong attitude — perhaps that John or Sue is too young to make such a decision, or that the religious life is too difficult. Misguided love may be looking for what is thought to be a more glamorous vocation for a son or daughter. If misguided love opposes, prevents or delays a religious vocation, there may be serious sin.

Children, if they are of age, have "the right of way" in answering a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. To please God and assure their own salvation, they must make the sacrifice of following their vocation without their parents' approval.

Will you pray that more parents may be guided by real love and right attitudes?

What Does It Take?

To be a priest, a religious Brother or Sister, what does it take? First of all, it takes a vocation. All the qualifications in the world won't add up to a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. God does the choosing.

The qualifications are a good heart, a good head, and good health. Only in certain cases is it within one's power to improve his health or to make better use of his intelligence; but we all can and should always work at our

spiritual improvement. Good health and intelligence are God's gifts to us; a good heart is our gift to Him. A "good heart" includes willingness to answer a call to the religious state. If this willingness is present, then there will be the generosity to answer a vocation, if one is given.

Fact has it that 75% of our Catholic young men and women have the qualifications for the religious life, yet less than 75% receive a religious vocation. St. John Bosco said that possibly one out of three is chosen by God for the religious state. Well, then, where are these truants from our American seminaries and convents? After rejecting the call, some have gone into business, others have gone on to college or have married.

To delay answering a vocation or to dodge it completely is a sad mistake. When another vocation is mistaken for the one God has in mind, who can weigh the consequences? Ponder and pray; don't dodge or delay!

Can You Tell Me?

"I think I have a vocation. Can you tell me . . . ?"

We're sure that you won't mind, if we answer you aloud, so that others can benefit by your questions. First of all, be thankful if you have a vocation — and be ever so glad! A religious vocation is a wonderful thing; not something to fear. Usually such a feeling comes from what is unknown about religious life. A whole flock of questions swoops upon the horizon. Will it be hard? Am I going to be lonesome? What if I make a mistake?

Will it be hard? Yes and no. Yes, because there are points of discipline to observe and religious routine to follow. No, because with the grace of a vocation comes the grace to live that vocation. Being faithful to duty brings one new graces to keep following the chosen way with great joy and peace of heart. In the religious life there is a family spirit, with holydays and feasts anticipated and celebrated by the community together. There are common works and interests, joys to share, and each religious has the support of the others' sympathy and help in sickness and sorrow.

Getting ready to go to the seminary or convent should be a happy experience. Ordinarily it is, even though sometimes a few dark clouds pass overhead — such as parental objection or thoughts of leaving home. As for getting lonesome, that's natural. College freshmen and first-year student nurses go through the same thing. Brides-to-be get weepy, too. So don't expect to be different — you're human, too.

What if I make a mistake? Is this what you mean: Supposing I don't make the grade or find out later that the religious life is not for me? No harm done. If those in charge judge that you are not suited for religious life, you will always have it to your credit that you were generous in following what you sincerely thought was your vocation. In your sincere attempt, you gain much merit and receive many graces that could not have been yours had you been less generous. So you see, a withdrawal, after a sincere effort and under the right circumstances, is a credit, not a discredit! Mother Church, being wise and

prudent, gives candidates to the priesthood and the religious life an ample period of trial before they make final decisions that bind for a lifetime.

Keep on the sunny side, where thoughts are brighter! See yourself as the Brother or Sister you wish to be, happily serving God.

How Do I Know?

It is Catholic dogma that God wills the salvation of all men. In seeking to know our vocation, we ask the question: In which of the three states does God will me to work out my salvation? It is in one particular state that I can save my soul most easily, most surely.

No young Catholic should push the thought of the religious state aside. Christ Himself chose this way of life; therefore, its very excellence merits first consideration. By consideration is meant serious thought, not a feather touch that lightly recalls associations or impressions and then lets the matter drop. Whether they are good or otherwise, previous impressions of individual priests and religious or experiences with teaching or nursing Sisters have no place in determining a personal vocation.

Choice of the religious state as a vocation is based, not on feelings or emotions, but on conviction — conviction of what God wills. Certainly an attraction to the religious state and pious affections may be present, but these are not at all necessary. Their absence does not mean that there is no vocation; it may indicate a lack of willing-

ness to enter the religious state. But willingness can be worked on, and a lack of it developed into real generosity. The trouble here is that the affections are holding on to what the world has to offer. There may be things, persons or places difficult to leave. Quite naturally, we cling to what is most familiar and dear to us, but this does not mean that we are not expected to give them up for a greater good. If values are properly balanced; if the temporal is given its passing place, then an appreciation of eternal values moves the will — makes us willing — to seek what is more lasting; actually, what is everlasting.

As their commendable record proves, American youth are capable of the sacrifice which the religious state demands. It is true that this state is not for all; but am I one for whom it *is* meant? I can safely say, after using this three-way combination: prayer, thought and good counsel. Then I shall know that I have reached the decision best for my personal happiness.

When Shall I Go?

Proper timing is a powerful factor for good or evil. It is God's precious gift used well or abused. One day's events are proof enough: an instant of quick action that saves hundreds from peril, an ill-plotted explosion, a newborn breathing just long enough to receive an essential Sacrament and bear its baptized soul back to its Creator.

How important is good timing in answering a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life? Good timing is all-

important. It takes only a bit of experience to teach us that things put off are sometimes never done. Vocations are realized at various age levels—grammar or high school, in college or later.

Once a religious vocation has been determined, GO—if you are free to go! By praying to the Holy Spirit with perseverance, it will become known to you just when you should take the step of entering the seminary or the convent. If your motive is first class (wanting God's will), you will be enlightened as to what good timing is in your particular case.

Delaying in order to see the world, or to put in a year of college without a justifying reason, or to satisfy someone else's wish that you wait a year, is neither wisdom nor prudence. The invitation to "Come, follow Me," may not be renewed at the end of the delay. By that time the buzz of the world may have blighted your ideals, with only yourself and your lack of resolution to blame. If delay is equivalent to holding back or to giving in to someone's selfish demand, then suspect bad timing!

If I Must Wait?

If a hundred dollar bill—even a dime—lay on the sidewalk, no one would need a push to pick it up. Opportunities like that—right under our nose—are readily grasped.

But lasting opportunities, with eternal values, are too often allowed to pass. A vocation to the priesthood or the religious life is such an opportunity. Boys and girls

who have a vocation and recognize its value won't need a push to claim the treasure. Nor will they let anyone walk over their treasure by trying to discourage them from accepting it. They know that if they let their treasure lie idle, through unnecessary delay, the opportunity may disappear.

But if they must wait for some good reason? That is a different story. Just let them take good care of their treasure. Would you carry a diamond in a tin can? What is precious and desirable deserves good care. A vocation is preserved and nourished by prayer and the Sacraments, by spiritual reading, and by wise use of leisure time. Add to this some apostolic work promoted by the parish. With this good care, a vocation will remain strong. It will be there waiting for you when you are free to follow it.

Perhaps a religious vocation may not have the sparkle of a coin in the sun. The shadow of Christ's Cross is more apparent here. Yours will be an exchange of the sparkle of the world's pleasures and possessions for the priceless grace of living closer to Christ as a priest or a religious Brother or Sister. All this and heaven too!

**FROM THOUGHT
TO ACTION**

*(Kathy Goes to
the Convent)*

First Step

Kathy called at the rectory one wintry evening to talk over her vocation with Monsignor. She had already waited a few minutes past her appointment — and shortly after guessed the reason why. At the sound of Monsignor's voice, she glanced toward the corridor. No, he was going on, followed by Dennis Mark and Judy Ross.

"Judy will make a wonderful wife," Kathy thought, as she automatically confirmed Dennis and Judy's wedding plans.

Monsignor was soon back to greet Kathy.

"What happened to your wrist, Kate?"

"Oh, it's only sprained, Monsignor. I slipped on the floor at the CYO dance."

"Falling for someone, Kate!" They both laughed, but Kathy took advantage of the opening and hurried in a remark: "That's just what I've come to talk to you about — I think I *have* fallen for Someone!"

There was a second of silence. Monsignor looked at Kathy. "The image of her mother when she was in her teens," he thought. It would be quite natural for any lad to look twice at Kate (a name only Monsignor could call her) — but for a long time he had thought....

Kathy's voice interrupted Monsignor's musings with a start.

"Monsignor, do you think I'd make a good nun?"

Kathy had taken the first step along the way to answering a vocation to the religious life. She had expressed her desire to a priest and asked his opinion.

Breaking the News

Kathy left the rectory on wings. Monsignor, too, thought that she had a vocation—even said he had spotted her four years ago in eighth grade. Now she'd go home and break the news to the family; that is, to Mother and Dad. She'd wait to tell the others. Just then she experienced a queer feeling — what was it? Suddenly Kathy knew that she was more excited than she realized, maybe a little scared. How would her parents react? Maybe not so well . . . like Betty's family. No, . . . she didn't think so. Would she tell them both at once or one at a time? She'd tell them both tonight!

Kathy bounced up the front steps. Dad was just switching off the TV. The living room was strangely quiet. Danny was asleep upstairs, and the rest must be studying in the second floor den.

"Want me to fix you a snack?" Kathy asked.

"Wouldn't miss it for all Wall Street," her father declared. "You're as good as your mother at keeping a man well nourished," and he winked in her direction.

"It's true," Kathy's mother agreed. "And not only that. The man you marry will be lucky in many other ways, too."

Kathy sat down with a little determination. "But" — she hung on to the words, "... I am not planning on getting married."

"Kathy McKean — a spinster!" Her father was amused.

"Of course not." Her mother was coming to Kathy's rescue.

Kathy wanted to be serious; Dad was in a teasing mood.

"I know!" Mr. McKean flicked his cigarette lighter with a quick little gesture. "You're going to the convent!" He was delighted with his newest prediction.

"Exactly!" Kathy barely breathed the word, but her parents heard in it a calm determination.

"Are you serious, Kathy?"

"Of course, Mom. Monsignor thinks I have a vocation, too. I saw him after Sodality."

A half hour went by. Dad rounded off the discussion with the practical remark: "I think we are ready for that snack, Kathy."

Later when Kathy was thinking things over, she was sure her parents were a hundred per cent behind her.

Scanning New Horizons

Kathy was practically snowed under with vocation literature. Monsignor had been collecting it for fifty years and insisted that she look everything over!

"Well, that's that!" Kathy sighed half aloud. She made no move to pick up the literature spread over the floor. She was thinking. And as the thoughts moved in and out, her fingers slowly traced the outline of a flower in the rug pattern.

"There's certainly a variety of Orders and Congregations . . . , cloistered nuns and active Sisters. . . . That's the big division. Active Sisters relive Christ's life of prayer and action, with works of penance, too. Cloistered nuns relive Christ's life of prayer and penance. That's what the pamphlet said. I'm meant for the active. . . . Monsignor says so, too. There are so many things to be done: . . . teaching, nursing, caring for old folks and orphans. Teach, nurse—I don't care which."

Kathy reached out for a piece of literature. "I'm happy to tell you . . . Christ is my Love," it said. A young Sister smiled up at Kathy.

"I'll be seeing you," Kathy thought. These Sisters had taught her in grammar school. It's a funny thing—Monsignor had said: "You'll know which community to go to; one is meant for you and you'll be attracted to it. The choice is up to you."

She had known even then—but how could she escape Monsignor's collection! Now she'd have to get going and lug it back down the block.

"Well, it wasn't a total loss," Kathy told herself on the way to the rectory. "I learned a lot from reading it."

The sun was shining and she began to hum.

This would have to be her best writing. Kathy took up her pen — and immediately set it down.

"I suppose I shouldn't use this pink stuff," and she wondered how Reverend Mother would react to the painted face under the parasol at the top of the sheet. On second thought she called to her mother and borrowed a piece of plain white. For a moment Kathy studied the engraved initials KLM.

"I'm glad Mom named me after herself. This will be fine." Kathy picked up her pen a second time and hesitated.

"You're stalling, Kathy," she accused herself. "No, not exactly," she protested. "Just wondering how to start." Then she began a mental composition, writing across her mind . . . :

Dear Reverend Mother,

I would like to make application to enter your community on next September 8. I am a senior at Central Catholic High School and expect to graduate this June.

My spiritual director also believes that I have a vocation to the religious life. My parents are favorably disposed and would bring me for an interview, if you wish. . . .

Now her pen was moving carefully over the paper. "I should have an answer soon," she pondered; "in

a week, maybe.... Dot your i's and cross your t's straight.... This should make the afternoon pickup.... That's it — 'Sincerely yours, Kathleen McKean'.... Dear Blessed Mother, I hope I'm accepted.... Come along, Tippy.... I'll just about make it.... Don't bark, Tippy; it's only the mailman."

Tippy rolled in the snow, sniffed it, powdered her nose with it. But Kathy missed all the dog's invitations to play — her thoughts were far away.

Getting Ready

"Open."

Kathy complied, and the dentist began to work. There was music playing.

"Always a pleasant distraction at a time like this," Kathy silently approved. At the turn of each tune, she tried to identify it, and then listened appreciatively. The time went fast and then came the last squirt of cinnamon-flavored mouthwash.

"Everything's fine, Kathy." The dentist pushed back the instrument tray. "Now for that paper you want filled out."

Kathy followed Dr. George into his private office.

"What do you need this for, Kathy — nursing school?"

"Not yet — maybe some time." Kathy hadn't expected any questions. "I'm going into training for the sisterhood."

"That so?" Dr. George's voice was kind. "You haven't seen much of the world yet. Why not stay out a while and test your vocation?"

Kathy found words to answer. "That's why I am going to the convent now—to test my vocation. I'll have to live the life to know if I'm suited for it."

Kathy hesitated a minute. "It's the same with your Peggy; she's starting nurse's training, and that's how she's going to find out if she's really cut out to be a nurse."

Dr. George was writing. "Here you are," he smiled. "Come in again before you go."

Kathy walked to the bus stop.... That answer she had given Dr. George—she recalled having read something like that in Monsignor's collection of vocation literature, and it had confirmed her own conviction.

Checking a List

The doorbell rang: —.—. No mistaking. It was Pete, the summer substitute mailman. Kathy could tell from the way he buzzed the bell.

There was a letter from Reverend Mother!

"Your medical and dental reports are satisfactory.... Enclosed is a list of clothing and articles needed.... Please be at the Motherhouse on Friday, September 8, before 2:00 P. M."

"I'm in!" Kathy's heart gave a leap. She was on her way to find her mother.

"This calls for a celebration, Kathy."

"Oh, Mom, that's just like you!"

"Why not! What would you like to do?"

"Well—I know it's hard to keep track of the kids, but they'd love swimming and a picnic at Jones Park."

"And they'll love you for suggesting it! Now, let's take a look at the list."

"Look, Mom; it says you may bring any music. Do you suppose that means I'll be keeping up my piano?"

"It sounds that way. You're to bring a Bible. You could take the premium we got from the Catholic Book Club."

"But it says 'small.' "

"You can have the one in the living room, then."

"I'm glad you and Dad gave me that complete Latin and English edition of the daily missal for Christmas. I've got the pen and pencil set, too. Mom, look at all the sewing equipment—*sewing!* That's my Waterloo!"

"Not necessarily. You can start right now and help me with your postulant's dresses."

"I'll bet I'll have to make my habit some day."

"Probably, but after working on the pleats of a postulant's dress, making the plain Franciscan habit will be a simple matter."

"Mom, we're going to be doing more shopping than a bride and her mother!"

Life for the next few weeks would be centering around a trunk. Shopping and packing; unpacking and repacking!

"Surprise!"

Kathy had innocently walked into a trap—in her own back yard. About thirty of her former classmates had slipped through the picket gate.

"Surprise!" they shouted and literally showered her with presents. Within seconds Kathy was surrounded with an assortment of gifts.

"Hold it, Kathy!" A camera clicked.

"Would you model a few things?" There was no time to answer. Someone hoisted her black umbrella, and Kathy put on her black summer gloves. Cameras clicked again.

"Come on," Kathy invited. "Two of you share my shawl." The three endured the long wool item.

"That's all right for the North Pole; but not the U. S. A. in July!" a model complained.

"I never knew that girls going to be Sisters had showers." Kathy's little sister Ellen had entered the scene.

"I never thought of it myself," Kathy smiled.

The girls were getting ready to leave. Kathy still held a gift in her hand. How would she ever thank them all!

"Thank you very much, each and every one," she said simply. "Not even all the words in this Collegiate Dictionary would be enough to express my thanks to you."

"You baked that cake we had, Mom. I'd know your cake anywhere in the world. You knew about the shower all along!"

There was a twinkle in her mother's eyes. Kathy knew she'd miss home and all her friends.

"But," her other self whispered, "that's part of finding the pearl of great price."

Nearing the Day

They watched the express man drive away with Kathy's trunk.

"Now, Danny," Kathy caught up her three-year-old brother; "you won't be playing with the locks on my trunk any longer nor trying to hide in it."

Danny hid his face on Kathy's shoulder, knowing full well that he was thoroughly loved in spite of his mischief.

For the next few hours Kathy turned to the task of settling her room. Where would she begin? How would she get rid of all the stuff? Her clothes were no problem; they would fit her sister Janie. She could leave the skirts and dresses right in the closet.

The jewelry, . . . perfume? Kathy's eyes swept over the chest of drawers. That could go to her sisters, too. She opened a drawer. Pressed corsages, the autograph book, report cards, perfect attendance certificates? "I'll burn all that — I can't take it with me!"

She picked up her wallet and extracted a few pictures. Red Cross card—better save that. Driver's license; Daddy would keep that up until she was professed; she could sign the renewal and mail it back to him. Then it would be up to Reverend Mother to decide if she would need a license beyond that time. Most likely yes. Driving was useful among today's Sisters; that much she knew. The Sisters' apostolate takes them on wheels in many different directions.

She checked her suitcase—the first she had ever owned, a gift from her godparents.

"We'll have initials put on when you get your new name," they promised.

"That's almost a year away," Kathy reflected. Tomorrow they'd be on their way to the Motherhouse—Mother, Daddy, and Brian to help with the driving. She was excited and eager to get started.

"Kathy," her mother's voice called up the stairs, "Monsignor is here to say good-by."

Kathy ran a comb through her hair; washed her hands, tipped the cologne bottle and went downstairs.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

*(A Peek
at a Postulant)*

Entrance Day

They came from all directions. It was entrance day at the convent. There had been months of preparation. First came the decision to enter religious life; then came the "shopping" for a particular community of Sisters. Some knew right from the start where they wanted to enter; others had to look around a bit.

Each candidate for the sisterhood knows that there is one particular community to which she has a calling. It should be entirely her choice. This choice she owes to no one. It is hers alone, not a parent's, not a teacher's. Divine Providence has the leading influence in this choice; circumstances, persons, places may contribute to it.

Entrance day is a great day for postulants — a day that pays its own tribute to them. It is a day of triumph won by their youthful love for Christ and their ready will to follow Him.

Swing Away

Postulants at play are a gay group. It may be a song they swing or a ball bat. One Saturday, just when the hills were in their prettiest colors, a bus pulled away from St. Elizabeth's Motherhouse. Aboard were — you

guessed it — the postulants, off to the State Park for a picnic.

There isn't anything new about baseball, but these players stealing bases in billowy skirts were the chief attraction at the Park that day. Wholesome recreation is something that everyone needs. A postulant's recreation sets its own bright spot in the priceless pattern of religious joy.

"Jingle Bells . . ."

Convent bells might be something of a mystery to a new postulant, but not for long. When she learns the where and why of the summons, she quickly puts herself into harmony with them. With the aid of her little watch, pocketed or pinned on her postulant's dress, she even anticipates certain bell calls. Never the rising bell, of course!

All through the day, bells call her to chapel, to meals, to class. Their clatter somehow soon shifts from the unusual to the ordinary, and then suddenly a postulant realizes that she couldn't manage without them.

Even though a postulant may have a secret hope for no bells in heaven, still she knows that a convent bell is as God's own voice calling.

Inside Story

What books does a postulant use? First, there is her prayer manual, once so new that it opened with a little

crackle. Its red ribbon she places at the opening page of morning prayers and moves it through the day as her prayer schedule unfolds.

At Mass she uses her missal, unless, of course, there is singing. Then, moving to her place in choir, she takes along her hymn book. By January she's quite a chanter, and now she can recall with a smile the day back in September when voices were tested. She had always been an alto, but her excitement on testing day, so she thinks, actually repitched her voice to soprano. But all said and sung, she likes best the mornings she "prays twice"—that is, sings hymns at Mass or sings high Mass.

At meals she uses her little grace book. On arrival, she discovered that convent grace before and after meals is a bit more solemn than the usual "Bless us, O Lord," and "We give Thee thanks."

A postulant's textbooks vary in subject and are styled to suit her as a teacher-in-training, as a registered nurse, or a college graduate. Lastly, there are her meditation and spiritual reading books. These are important because they help her with mental prayer and give her food for thought during the day.

With this brief look, then, you have the inside story on a postulant's books!

"Dear Mom and Dad . . ."

Writing home is a "must" for postulants. They keep their family posted on what's new and what's news at the convent.

"... Mom, my postulant dresses are getting a bit tight. We're told to eat—so it's not quite my fault! I really think it's the mid-a. m. and p. m. break that does it, and the homemade bread; and there seems to be a pre-Lent rush to consume all the candy in the postulate! At this time of year, when there's no baseball or volleyball, I'm not so active. You don't keep slim riding a toboggan. But just wait! When spring comes, I'll be your dream girl again!"

"While I think of it, . . . I won't be writing during Lent; but keep the letters coming, because on feast days, such as St. Patrick's, we get mail.

"We had recreation with the novices today. (You know we are in different sections of the Motherhouse.) I saw Toby—pardon—Sister Mary Joel and Sister Maura Anne (Grace Kirk). Both are fine. Sister Joel's sister, Mary K., the one finishing nursing school, is coming next September—to enter, I mean. That was the big news Sister Joel was dying to tell me. . . ."

And so her chatter to loved ones at home goes on, but the grandest message of all is the one they read between the lines: Their daughter is really happy!

Her Cleaner Sweep

In addition to her daily round of dusting and dishes, each postulant helps make the "cleaner sweep" known as spring housecleaning. Enfolded in her apron, she gathers broom, mop and pail and proceeds to her post.

If her height falls short, she returns to the utility room for a ladder.

When the postulant mistress comes upon her twenty minutes later, she finds my fair lady in the clouds, with duster posed in mid-air. Sister's soft, smiling voice puts the fluffy duster into motion once again. My fair lady smiles back and knows that she won't have to explain that she was simply admiring the intricacy of a lacy, sun-splashed cobweb!

Reception Gown

Lately from the world where the wiles of style prevail, a postulant is struck by the simplicity of the religious habit. There's no stitching for style in her sewing sessions, but you can't match her excitement as she works on her own habit.

"I made it myself," she'll be telling her family when reception day comes. Her new habit may be dull in color, but the day she wears it for the first time will be the brightest spot in the year.

Happy Feast Day

Have you ever heard it said that Sisters seem to stay young? What's the answer? Well, perhaps it's because Sisters keep name days, not their birthdays!

Every Sister has the name Mary, even if she has another patron saint. The form of Mary can be Marie, Maura, Miriam, Maureen, etc.

Among postulants there is much speculation about the new names they will be given on reception day. How does a postulant get her religious name? In general it works this way. Each postulant selects three names she likes, in the order of her choice. If possible, her first preference is granted. Since names are not duplicated, a postulant usually keeps her choice of name a secret, the better to protect her selection. Her new name will determine her feast day (in some Orders called name day) celebrated each year by the community after she is a professed Sister (a Sister who has taken vows).

For feast day celebrations at the Motherhouse, postulants and novices contribute, too. They add the festive note with table decorations, a special something for the menu, and the singing at the feast day Mass.

Day of Joy

When a bride puts on her veil, when a nurse is capped, when a postulant receives the habit of her chosen religious community, it is a day of boundless joy.

Woman is meant to serve and when she finds her sphere of service, her way of dedication, her happiness is profound.

Does a bride think that all her days will be hours of lace and flowers? No. Does a nurse anticipate only unruffled times, smooth like her freshly-starched uniform? Of course not. And the new novice? Will no shadow

ever cross the memory of her beautiful reception day?
She knows differently.

The bride's veil, the nurse's cap, the new novice's habit are but symbols telling of love in each respective heart; and love makes the difference. Love expects a challenge. This challenge each one meets with the grace of her specific vocation, by giving of herself in service and sacrifice. This is the measure of her love, the worth of her spirit of dedication. For the sake of being true to her love, she will be faithful to her rainbow path, where the bright colors of joy sometimes blend with the deeper hues of sorrow, even of suffering.

Now this is "life worth living": to be faithful to one's vocation and thus faithful to God until the end!

